

PS BUYERS GUIDE THE \$850 POWER TOOL BOX

PRODUCT	MAKER	MODEL	PRICE / PRICE SOURCE	USES	KEY ACCESSORIES
ANGLE GRINDER	Hitachi	G12SR3	\$50 / toolbarn.com	Grinding, cutting almost anything	Goggles, hard/soft pads, coarse-fine discs, grinding wheels, cutting discs, diamond blade
RANDOM ORBITAL SANDER	Porter Cable	333	\$65 / cpoworkshop.com	Prepping for varnish, general sanding	Sanding discs and buffing pad
FEIN MULTI-MASTER	Fein	MSxe 636-2 RS	\$185 / tylertool.com	Removing paint, cutting/sanding in tight spots, removing 3M 5200	Universal E-Cut blade (along with a very complete kit of accessories)
DREMEL	Dremel	300 Series Kit	\$60 / homedepot.com	Polishing, cutting in tight spots	Assorted sanding and cutting discs
CORDLESS TOOLS					
14.4-VOLT DRILL/DRIVER	Makita	6339DWDE	\$200 / thedrillstore.com	Drilling, fastening	Assorted driver tips
9.6-VOLT ANGLE DRILL	Makita	DA391DWD	\$115 / thedrillstore.com	Mast projects, drilling in tight spots	Steel bits, spade bits, brad-point bits, hole saws, reamers, taps, wire brushes, pipe cutters, mixers
18-VOLT RECIPROCATING SAW	Milwaukee	6514-20	\$175 / acetoolonline.com	Cutting almost anything	Blades in different lengths, widths, and materials, including abrasive and toothed

Tested items are listed here. Newer, improved versions of the above tools or variations on the tool kits are also available. Practical Sailor searched for the best available prices at press time. Better prices may be available.

Aldora's Plug-in Power Tools for the Cruising Sailor

In the last decade, tool manufacturers have drastically improved their standard products. Today, all of the major manufacturers offer professional-grade power tools at reasonable prices. My personal choices are based on a wealth of experience with literally hundreds of tools owned by myself, my employees, and subcontractors. That said, other peoples' choices are often equally valid.

ANGLE GRINDER

This is a workhorse tool, capable of major demolition and grinding as well as delicate shaping and fitting. With 20-grit or 36-grit sanding discs, it will remove a lot of material. It's especially good at preparing surfaces for glue, resin, or epoxy adhesion. Finer grits are good for more delicate work. In practiced hands, a grinder is capable of very graceful sculpting and smoothing.

The grinder can also cut and shape metal, even stainless. A thin kerf metal cutting disc will slice off frozen nuts, bolts, and hardware in places where nothing else can reach. If you have reason to cut tile, cement, rocks, fossils, or seashells, bring along a dry-cut diamond blade as well.

I've been happy with the Hitachi grinder—my current two are both Model G12SR. The top-mounted switch works with either hand, the spindle lock is effective, and it has a nifty bracket that allows me to set it or hold it down with the disc spinning.

Safety note: The grinder is a potentially dangerous tool. Almost every pro I know removes the guard. This makes the tool much more versatile, but keep your fingers clear. Also, always use safety glasses! And, never ever use the very dangerous but incredibly useful trick of putting 6-inch attachments on your 4-inch grinder!

RANDOM ORBITAL SANDER

If you're going to do any finish work, painting, or varnishing, a sander is nice to have. My choice for all-around work is a 5-inch random orbital with hook-and-loop discs. It's aggressive enough to do a scuff job on bottom paint and delicate enough to refinish a table top. Of course, there are better tools for both of those jobs, but you can't carry everything.

My favorite is the Porter Cable Model 333. None of these sanders lasts very long doing boat work, but this one seems to be the most durable of those I've tried. It's also comfortable and has a good dust-collection port.

FEIN MULTI-MASTER

Originally developed by the medical industry for sawing plaster casts off without cutting flesh, it does its work with tiny oscillations at very high speed. Its saw blade will make clean, controlled cuts in wood, plastic, fiberglass, veneer, or any other relatively soft material. With a chisel or scraper blade, it will peel stuck things apart undamaged. A triangular sanding pad attachment makes short work of cleaning up corners, tight inside curves, or other small details. This is a tool that will literally do things that no other tool can do, like scribing a plastic trim ring to an irregular surface, or removing a hatch bedded in 3M's 5200.

DREMEL TOOLS

I've never owned a Dremel, so I can't speak with much authority on them, but I have boating friends who swear by them. I borrowed one last year to grind a flat surface on a broken bolt end, which I was then able to drill and extract. No other tool could have made that job possible, which is why I'll be getting one for the boat. —JS